The Builder.

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ONE of the most recent of Weale's little red rudimentary works, is a History of the Styles of Architecture, by Mr. Bury,* wherein the writer endeavours to show, as we also have again and again asserted, "that there is, perhaps, no art or science which possesses more extensive or prolific means of instruction and entertainment, or which has greater claims on the consideration of the world at large, than that of architecture." The architecture of a country is inseparable from its history;—"it is the external and enduring form of a people's habits—an index of their state of knowledge and social progress." In architecture, as in other things, we may say with Göethe, "There is neither rest nor pause, but ever movement and evolution,—a curse still clinging to standing still." How greatly our ideas of the past are elevated in imagination by its architectural relics seems to have escaped consideration. Mr. D'Israeli saw this, when he said at a recent dinner, speaking of the works of the architect,—"Depend upon it there is magic in form, to which human nature must ever be obedient. When we contemplate the past, even in ruins, we admire it, not merely from the associations of the past, but *because the past is embodied in the beautiful.* If all that remained of the past was a ruined cotton mill, you would not contemplate it as you do Tintern Abbey."

Mr. Bury re-treads the ancient paths, and has produced a pleasant book. Some of his historical statements are made with too little reservation, as if there were no such thing as doubt. For example, one among many, he writes that the temple of Belus "was founded by Semiramis, 1650 years before Christ,"—as if the bills were in our Record office (such as it is), and could be appealed to; whereas the fact is altogether doubtful, and the date more so. There are so many contradictory opinions as to the time at which this queen lived, even to the extent of centuries, that it is impossible to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion upon it; and one distinguished living writer asserts that Semiramis never existed at all, and that her history is simply an allegory, showing the power of maritime commerce!

There is a little want of chronological arrangement, too, in the first portion of the book; these objections, however, shall not prevent us from awarding praise to Mr. Bury for his work as a whole, and recommending it to such of our readers as require an introductory history of architecture.

A part of his concluding chapter will serve as a specimen of the writer's style, and give his opinion on three subjects,—Nash; competitions; and precedent-rule.

Nash, he says, "undoubtedly may be considered as the originator of a new class of arrangement in street architecture, and to whom, on account of his bold and masterly conceptions and improvements, London owes more than to any architect since the time of Wren: criticism has been too often unduly exercised on his works, which in some instances, in mouldings and details, are faulty; but when we consider the low state of architectural taste at the period of his career, and the immensity of the works on which he was engaged, his imperfections ought to be forgotten in our admiration of his mental energy and unceasing industry and exertion."*

Of competition he says:—

"The present system of selecting a design from a large number submitted in a general competition (all purporting, of course, to be in conformity with the instructions) is mostly favourable to the unprincipled and incompetent artist, whose professional dishonesty is too frequently successful, and he is chosen to increase the list of monuments of bad taste or parsimony, for which this country, more than any other, is so celebrated. The selection thus made is more generally influenced by the greater amount of ornamental features, and not by the superior composition of the design; it matters little if the ornaments are inappropriate, meretricious, or unequally distributed, or to what extent three sides of the building are impoverished or starved, so that the principal façade looks rich: in short, the quantity of enrichment seems to be the main object, without consideration as to its consistency for the purpose or situation of the building. The details of cathedrals, royal chapels, palaces, and princely mansions, are borrowed to disguise hospitals, schools, asylums, training colleges, and even workhouses. This dishonesty in the expression of a building, and the ignorant introduction or bad execution of useless ornament, seems to be sanctioned by custom, and is daily perpetrated;—success stimulates the empiric to proceed in his career, and the public taste becomes infected by his productions. May we not partly consider it as a sign of the times, when the unrealities, inconsistencies, and shadows of the art of architecture, are chosen in preference to works of sound judgment and sterling merit? or must we blame the fatality which too frequently permits some influential member of a committee to propagate his own mistaken views of architecture?"

And then of precedent:—

"From the errors of this system another has arisen, which, in ecclesiastical buildings, seems to hinder all advance in art: precedent is now the only rule, and from which it is heresy to depart;—'that which has been shall be,' without consideration as to whether it may or may not be perfect. The criterion of an artist's merit, or the groundwork of his fame, consists in servile copies of ancient examples, and too frequently in the introduction of features for which, by the change of our religious ceremonials and forms, there is not the least use.† The only requirement of an architect of the present day (so far as the erection or restoring of churches is concerned), seems to be a knowledge of the varieties of details of the Gothic buildings, which he is allowed to put together in any way he likes; for, according to the views of certain societies, they must of themselves produce a good building. Now if the letters of the alphabet of architecture, thus jumbled together without system or principle, are not generally unsuccessful in their combination, what noble results might we not expect to follow a proper study of the works of our ancestors, and a discovery of the essential elements of their art! Then would buildings be designed on the principles which brought to such perfection the works of the fourteenth century, and we should have harmonious compositions, instead of bad copies of the patched and mutilated erections of all dates."

As an example of the engravings with which Mr. Bury's work is illustrated, we give, on the following page, a view of Southwell Minster,—a well-known Norman structure.

Part II. of the "Rudiments of Civil Engineering," by Mr. H. Law, a portion of the same series, treats too cursorily (to justify the sub-heading "special construction") of roads, railroads, canals, docks, and bridges.

The same publisher has recently issued a second edition of Mr. Gibbons' excellent treatise "On the Law of Dilapidations;" a work which will be found of great service by all architects and surveyors, and indeed by others beside these.*

"I have been more spacious concerning this learning of waste," says Coke, "because it is most necessary to be known of all men;" and Mr. Gibbons, acting on the same motive, has been "more spacious" in this new edition, and has added the cases decided since the first edition was published, also the statutes passed.

Amongst books of this description, scarcely so well known as it deserves to be, is a volume on "The Law of Fixtures," by Mr. Standish Grady.† This is a subject on which many of our correspondents are seeking information, and, in reply to some of them, we may usefully extract, on another occasion, a portion of our author's chapter "Of the Right to Remove Fixtures set up for Ornament or Convenience and Domestic Use."

From the twisted course of law we pass to the production of the Grecian volute. Our readers will remember a letter from Mr. Jopling, a short time since, announcing his discovery of a simple adjustment for describing the volute and other scroll-work. Mr. Jopling has now published his method, in the shape of a small pamphlet,‡ with a request prefixed that reviewers will not publish any explanation of the adjustments. What the author sets forth is, "that while one end of a definite distance (a rod of any length), is carried round a circle once, the other end may be taken twice round another circle;" and his mode of doing this is shown in the pamphlet. Mr. Jopling has long laboured to impress the public with the importance of a knowledge of curved lines, and to induce a more general study of them. He now asserts that "the mystery which has so long hung over the simple cause of the great superiority in ancient Greek architecture and works of art, as to the beauty, proportion, and harmony of the forms which they introduced—'those refinements which marked the smallest production of the Grecian chisel,' as well as the largest features in their works of art—is now discovered beyond a doubt to be in a great degree owing to the scientific knowledge of particular and practical geometrical curved lines possessed by their architects, artists, and artizans, which instructed their mind and eye in truth, beauty, and variety of form, and enabled them to design and execute works which no other people have equalled."

It appears that others have been working in the same path. A correspondent, who signs himself "Edward Burstow," addressed a letter to us on the appearance of Mr. Jopling's communication just now referred to, stating that he had himself, ten years ago, invented a simple apparatus by which "every description of parallel and converging lines, and every continuous spiral line that may be required can be drawn, with as much ease as adjusting a pair of compasses, and making different circles from the same

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* "History and Description of the Styles of Architecture of Various Countries, from the Earliest to the Present Period." By T. Talbot Bury, Architect. Weale, Holborn. 1849.

* "The fate of the dead lion was Nash's; the difficulties attendant on the building of the new streets were of such a magnitude as few men could have contended against;—these and his good works have been forgotten, whilst small imperfections are noted."

† "To describe more minutely these peculiarities, would only be to direct censure to some buildings where the architects are not altogether responsible for the inconsistencies."

* "A Treatise on the Law of Dilapidations and Nuisances." By David Gibbons, Special Pleader. Weale. 1849.

† "The Law of Fixtures with reference to Real Property, and Chattels of a Personal Nature." By Standish Grove Grady, Barrister-at-Law. London: Owen Richards. 1845.

‡ "An Impulse to Art; or Ancient Greek Practical Principles for Volutes and Lines of Beauty innumerable." By Joseph Jopling, Architect. The Author: Felton Villa, Finchley-road.

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